

## Book Review

**Forensic Pathology of Trauma – Common Problems for the Pathologist, Michael J. Shkrum, David A. Ramsey. Humana Press (2007), ISBN-13: 978-1-58829-458-6, 10:1-58829-458-7, \$175**

This book is part of a series of publications on forensic science and medicine produced by Humana Press, the series being edited by the esteemed pathologist and toxicologist Dr. Steven B. Karch. Many of the publications in the series are focused on toxicology but where forensic medicine is concerned the two most prominent works are 'A Physicians Guide to Clinical Forensic Medicine' edited by Dr. Margaret Stark and this book 'The Forensic Pathology of Trauma'.

When reviewing a book such as this the first question one asks oneself is; what distinguishes this work from the many admirable texts in the field of forensic pathology? And in the case of 'The Forensic Pathology of Trauma' this is easy to answer. As the authors state in their preface

'The Forensic Pathology of Trauma: Common Problems for the Pathologist' is primarily intended for the use of pathologists who perform forensic autopsies as part of a general autopsy service, as opposed to those employed in dedicated forensic autopsy centers.

All too often texts in forensic pathology focus on the rare and obscure features of forensic autopsy practice and indulge in an exploration of issues that are mainly in the province of forensic pathology specialists and it is refreshing to see that these authors have addressed the needs of the often unsung heroes of forensic medicine, the general hospital based pathologists who are the backbone of the forensic autopsy service in many jurisdictions.

This is not to say that this work is of limited value to forensic pathology specialists, far from it. In its first two chapters this book distinguishes itself by addressing perhaps the most under recognised and yet critical areas of forensic pathology practice. The first of these is the notion of 'risk management' in autopsy practice focusing on the purpose of the autopsy and the basis for the nature of the examinations and tests undertaken. The benefits of a systematic approach and the way in which information from a variety of sources has to be integrated by a pathologist in meeting the complex and socio-legal needs of the medico-legal autopsy is well articulated and is an area all too often ignored in traditional forensic pathology teaching. The second of these chapters is a topic that presents perhaps the greatest of challenges to any pathologist whether working in clinical or forensic disciplines. It is

an area in which we all struggle to find the truth and an aspect of our practice where errors can cause the greatest of injustice. This topic covers the features of post mortem change and the way in which it can mimic disease and ante-mortem trauma. Sub titled the "Great Pretenders" this chapter is perhaps one of the most important in the book and should be required reading by any pathologist who regularly conducts autopsies.

The remainder of the chapters cover a range of classic trauma types giving each an autopsy focus and discussing the medico-legal significance of the findings with an eye to the critical conclusions that can be drawn from the observations. This approach is particularly noteworthy and distinguishes this work in a very positive light.

The book is well referenced and makes particular use of statistical observations in the literature to expose the significance of particular findings. The use of tables, lists and charts assists in the presentation of the material and together with over 400 illustrations make the text easily understood.

At first glance I was disappointed with the fact that the illustrations in the text were only in black and white a feature that in some images greatly limits their effectiveness in illustrating the topic in the text. Colour illustrations are indeed expensive for publishers to include on the printed page and in my experience they are reluctant to permit authors more than a bare minimum. The inclusion of a CD ROM containing all the illustrations in full colour makes up for this however, it would have been nice to have had some colour images on the printed page especially where the colour is a critical factor in the interpretation of the particular findings.

The layout of this book and approach taken by the authors is to be highly commended and it illustrates many of the difficulties experienced by forensic pathologists in their daily work. Importantly it also offers an approach to addressing these problems in a way that allows the forensic pathologist to provide both safe and probative evidence to our justice system.

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